

**Remarks of Lesley Weiss, Chair**  
**U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad**  
**Dedication Ceremony of a Holocaust Memorial in Gherla Romania**  
**May 22, 2016**

Mayor Sabo and Members of the City Council of Gherla, survivors and families, Ambassador Samash, Oana Rogoveanu of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mike Klein, members of the community, and all who have participated in the building of this memorial, I am honored to be here today.

The Commission was established to address the concern that the physical remnants of Jewish heritage in Central and Eastern Europe, largely depopulated of Jews by the Holocaust and Communist repression, was being lost due to destruction or neglect. The Commission's mandate includes obtaining agreements from governments in the region that cultural properties, including places of worship, historic sites, cemeteries, and memorials, will be protected and preserved. It also identifies sites and helps restore and mark sites.

I want to express my appreciation for the tremendous work done to make this memorial a reality by Mike Klein, originally from Gherla but now of the United States. I also want to compliment the architects, Dominic and Raul Teleki and Bogdan Suciu Ciulei; the builders, the Koto Brothers; and the President of the Gherla Jewish Community: Alexander Sommer. I want to acknowledge Commission Member Herbert Block for his role in facilitating the project, and my friends Laurie and Robert Wexler, whose commitment to preserving the memory of Gherla's Jewish community is inspiring.

I am also in Romania this week as a member of the U.S. delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance conference in Bucharest. Romania chairs the Alliance this year. The mission of this intergovernmental organization is to encourage and support Holocaust education and remembrance. Today's event is a perfect example for others to follow.

As we gather today to memorialize and pay tribute to the Jews of Gherla killed in the Holocaust, we meet in a peaceful place and at a peaceful time

for Romania. This moment is all the more remarkable given the grim history of this region.

In 1940, the fascist regime governing wartime Transylvania systematically excluded Jews from all economic and political life, stripped them of their fundamental human rights and, ultimately, deported them to concentration and death camps. My family, 200 kilometers away in the Carpathians suffered the same fate as the Jews of Transylvania. Just as happened to Jews in Gherla, my grandfather was conscripted into a labor brigade in 1942. When the Jews of Gherla arrived in Auschwitz on May 27, my mother was a slave laborer in Birkenau, having arrived a few weeks earlier, her family killed upon arrival.

As is the case with many of the survivors, the killing sites are the cemeteries of our families.

This memorial identifies the more than 1,000 Jews killed during that dark period. It would not have happened without the leadership and the support of all of you here today. Your work exemplifies what the Commission was founded to do – to preserve, restore, protect and memorialize the cultural history of Europe associated with America, a nation of immigrants-and in the case of Gherla, a place associated with the heritage of both Americans and Romanians.